ANAK Tnk
Helping disadvantaged children in Manila since 1998

April 2026
Journal #73

Editorial

Pascal Breton - President of ANAK-Tnk

Dear Friends,

I remember the beginning of ANAK-Tnk, in 1998. At the time, there was 'THE' baby of the foundation. We used to love visiting him in our very first home for street children. He was the exception: the one whose story led him, almost by miracle, all the way to us. Like a child we weren't expecting, yet whom we welcomed with all our love. The staff cherished him as the youngest of **a large family of twenty children**.

At what moment, and how, did the Philippines insidiously transform this exception into a norm today. How did we slowly accept that the inconceivable become commonplace?

We cannot and **we mustn't get used to it!**

What we must do, on the other hand, is to continue to respond as best we can, in particular thanks to the centres we have dedicated to the youngest over the years.

We must also continue our work upstream to support the poorest families in the slums to help, at our level, try to reduce the phenomenon.

And we must continue to hope that The Philippines will return one day to reason, **by placing the children, their well-being and their education, once again, at the heart of a true social project**. A project which would finally hand back to this wonderful country and to its wonderful people all the hope it deserves. ♥

Tragic innocence...

Father Matthieu Dauchez
Head of the Foundation in Manila

The title of this article is slightly provocative, I admit, yet if innocence is obviously synonymous with purity and kindness, that doesn't change the fact that it also **accentuates the tragic aspect of the street children,** at times hidden behind smiles which make us forget the hell they have endured. One visitor, a few weeks ago, told me he was far more moved by the homes for toddlers than by the dump and its children, who obviously also shocked him. In fact, there are three clear signs which indicate the escalating level of misery in the city: the increase in the number of young girls on the streets, despite the Philippines being a matriarchal country which defends girls at all costs, **the appearance of elderly people abandoned on the sidewalks of the city too**, which is inconceivable in a country whose honour lies in caring for the elderly. Finally, the third sign, probably the most revolting one, is the remarkable fall in the average age of the abandoned children on the streets of Manila. To such a point that the foundation has had to open four homes for children under the age of six in order to offer an appropriate approach for this very young age. **And while the smiles bring us joy every day, the scandal remains:** is our world so sick that it abandons the most vulnerable?

Our heart bleeds... ■

« smiles which make us forget the hell they have endured »

A First Visit to Manila

Lydwine Vacher
France Network Coordinator

I joined the big ANAK-Tnk family just a year ago and it was important for me to visit Manila : to meet the children and understand where they came from, **to better understand the actions of the foundation, and to touch on the heart of the mission.** So I spent two weeks at the heart of the Foundation, experiencing the daily rhythm, guided by Élise and Charles (whom I thank from the bottom of my heart).

It is very difficult to summarise such an intense experience in a few words.

I was particularly moved by the joy that lives in the centres, even as the children's stories are so difficult and their wounds so deep. They are extremely moving, smiling, and endearing, and I admire their courage and their will. When I spoke to the students, some of whom arrived at the foundation very young, I thought to myself **'what a road they've walked since the hell of the streets'!**

The slums and night marauding were very intense: the poverty and living conditions of so many children and families are even more violent and revolting than we can imagine. There are so many of them and their poverty is so extreme.

I was **very impressed by all the actions on the ground** and the fact that Father Matthieu, Elise and Charles, with the help of all the staff, are able to manage the Foundation efficiently and kindly while at the same time maintaining a very strong, kind and loving relationship with each child. A complete devotion, an unwavering trust in God, an XXL family!

I returned to France with an even greater determination to act and bear witness! And in profound alignment with ANAK-Tnk's two-fold mission: to work with the poor and vulnerable in Manila, but **also to spread the children's message**, and that is to share that the most important thing in our very busy lives is to to Love with Joy and Care for others, wherever we may be. ■

Angelo

Elise Cruse
Communications and Partnership Manager

A Night Maraude: a young boy is found alone on a sidewalk. He doesn't know how to speak yet, and is having difficulty walking. He is entrusted to our street educators, and the tiny one is welcomed in our homes. Despite great research, **no parent or family member comes to claim the child**. With no name and no information, the foundation 'creates' an identity (following the legal process set up by the Filipino social services for these situations). His name is now Angelo.

Contrary to what we might think, the fact that a child arrives at our homes at a very young age does not make things easier. In the years that follow, Angelo is very unstable and returns to the street many times. Without roots, how can he build himself? Disillusioned by an idealised family, this instability becomes a mode of survival. It tells a story of absence, and in particular, a deep need for **safety, constancy, and lasting love**. The fear of being abandoned once again leads Angelo to choose to cause the break rather than wait for it to occur.

Angelo is now 19; he is no longer at the foundation as he is independent, he works and visits us regularly to our greatest joy. Our relationship is very strong: he lived in our homes for more than 17 years. We still have no trace of his birth relatives, but he can count on his family of the heart. Angelo reminds us of an essential truth. **A child needs one thing, both simple and radical at the same time: someone who stays**. And that is precisely where our commitment finds its real significance: transforming love into actions, and presence into hope. ♥

Children as Teachers

William Desvallon
Vice-President of ANAK-Tnk France

Like many former volunteers, I often bear witness, here and there, when I am requested to do so. I would like to use the same title to head my humble presentation. We usually believe children go to school to learn. Being with the children of the foundation shows me that in fact **they are the ones teaching us,** without really knowing it, and we are their pupils. For example, every time I go to a slum, I expect to see the shocking misery. Children of the slums, dressed in rags, searching the dump, to collect just about enough for a meagre ration of a daily meal. Children bent over, amid flies, sorting waste most of the day. During one of these visits, I started playing with one of them. Another soon joined us with a big smile on his face. And another, and another still! **Each as joyful as one another.** This image has been etched into my heart. At night, on the streets, the children are just as miserable, but they are sad. It took me a few meetings with them to grasp the reason of this perceived joy in the slums. One essential difference: at the heart of the slums, the children live with their families **a place where love is present despite the dire living condition.** On the streets, the children are sad, alone, abandoned by all; no tenderness, no love given or received. I returned home with this treasure of a lesson. When love spreads, it transmits joy and can help overcome all the hardest challenges. Thank you to the children ! ♥

Evaluating the Emergency

Guillemette de Terves
Volunteer Assistant in Accounting, Partnerships and IT in Manila

In Manila, the streets take us back to a striking reality: to each day its own troubles. The children experience it and endure it every day. During the night maraudes (Big Nights), we sometimes bring back very young children to our nurseries, homes which are designed to welcome tiny children. In these situations, the street educators' work is essential in order to fully understand the situation and help determine emergencies.

During a recent mauraude, a 4 and 5 year-old brother and sister were brought to the educators by their grandmother. She was alone and living in great poverty, unable to take care of them. **An extremely delicate and rare situation** which our educators and social assistants confirmed to be an emergency.

In other cases, a mother sometimes wishes to entrust their child from the first encounter, without sharing any further information on the family situation. The educators' role is then to take the time with the mother to retrace as much as possible the elements which may lead her to such a choice. An enquiry is needed.

Each situation is unique, and the choice of 'abandoning' is not always immediately understandable for us volunteers, with our very European perspective and without knowing the families' stories. Our trust and understanding relies here on the educators' dialogue and work. What remains essential is acting within a dialogue, respecting the child's desire, and in particular their well-being. ♥

Photo : @CartierPhilanthropy
BenBuckLand for ANAK-Tnk

Love in action

Charles Cruse
Head of Human Resources in Manila

This is the theme chosen this year for the whole Foundation.

The street children and families of the slums endure great poverty, and even more so a great indifference. They teach us that loving them is making a clear choice of commitment because true love involves service and laying down concrete actions. It is transforming compassion into daily commitment, an action which restores dignity and hope.

Offering a roof and meals is necessary, offering a simple smile can be life-changing.

Love in Action: fighting indifference. ■

Staying Calm Through the Storm

William Desvallon
Vice-President of ANAK-Tnk France

As mentioned by Father Matthieu on the first page, we have four homes welcoming the youngest children. I decide to visit the young girls' home, and the following day the young boys' home. From outside everything seems peaceful, until I ring the bell to announce myself. At that moment, **multiple happy and curious little faces** appear to greet me. As soon as I set foot inside, I instantly become the main centre of attention of this joyful little team. Each wanting a piece of attention, one grabbing my sleeve, another shouting to attract my attention, a third pushing the first, while the fourth climbs onto me... **I rapidly become overwhelmed by this little group of assailants** with their incredible energy. I soon tell myself I need to find a trick to get out of the mess that is building up, and to calm everyone down. So I sit strategically in a corner, and pick up a quiet game. The children do the same and come up to me to show me their activity, one with a doll, another with a pencil and paper, two more with a dining set. A little sorry for the mess my visit had created, I observe the team of women who supervise the home, smiling kindly at me, but more so **who remain calm in the middle of the 'storm'**. Fortunately, I know they will know how to restore the calm soon after I leave and I am stunned, impressed by their talent and their kindness. ■

Siblings

Elise Cruse
Communications and Partnership Manager in Manila

After several days of discussions with the street educators, Maria accepted to come to our homes.

Maria, age 11, sat in front of the Seven Eleven, holding her younger brother Joseph, 9 months old, tight in her arms. Her family was broken by drugs and abandonment, and Maria thus became more than a sister: **she was a guardian, protector and even a substitute parent**. She looks over Joseph with overwhelming attention, begs for the milk he needs, supported by the fragile solidarity of the other families on the streets around her. She then shows us her 'shelter' : **a simple piece of cardboard, an old broken baby carriage for Joseph**.

We are impressed by this little girl.

In the extreme vulnerability, an unexpected strength shines through. This hope, in the form of a sister, a brother, always present. In the night on the street, the brotherly link remains a source of light. ♥

Occasions to Love

Katie
Head of USA ANAK-Tnk division

Great occasions to love rarely offer themselves, small occasions perpetually occur. Hundreds of staff and volunteers have worked at ANAK-TNK over the years, supporting the children in countless ways.

Surely, there have been many 'great' occasions to love. Whether it be staff convincing kids to leave the streets or staff helping kids in moments of mental, emotional, or health crisis.

More often than not, however, **the days and nights are filled with 'small' moments of love**, such as staff working in the heat to care for the basic day-to-day needs of the children. The children, too, are sources of joy for the staff and volunteers, often filling the Foundation with smiles and laughter during the large feast day gatherings and during the quiet hours at home.

While the 'great' occasions of love and joy are often what we remember and share (rightfully so, as they are often so impactful), **let us never underestimate the importance of the small moments too! As the Filipino slogan goes, "Every Drop Counts!"**

In this spirit, the ANAK-TNK USA movement works diligently in the 'little' moments as well as the 'big' to support the children in the Philippines. While monetary and material donations help the foundation in 'big' ways, let us not forget the enduring power of loving those around us in the 'little' moments and sharing with others the stories of the children at ANAK-TNK.

These stories, no matter how simple they may be, speak volumes and proclaim to the world that truly, **"Love Always Wins!". ❤**

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